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# AIR COMMAND AND STAFF COLLEGE

## STUDENT REPORT

BOOK ANALYSIS OF EISENHOWER AND  
BERLIN, 1945 THE DECISION  
TO HALT AT THE ELBE

MAJOR JEFFERY R. MERKINS 88-1825  
"insights into tomorrow"

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**REPORT NUMBER** 88-1825

**TITLE** BOOK ANALYSIS OF EISENHOWER AND BERLIN, 1945 THE  
DECISION TO HALT AT THE ELBE

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Submitted to the faculty in partial fulfillment of  
requirements for graduation.

**AIR COMMAND AND STAFF COLLEGE**  
**AIR UNIVERSITY**  
**MAXWELL AFB, AL 36112-5542**

UNCLASSIFIED

SECURITY CLASSIFICATION OF THIS PAGE

A192, 611

## REPORT DOCUMENTATION PAGE

Form Approved  
OMB No. 0704-0188

1a. REPORT SECURITY CLASSIFICATION UNCLASSIFIED			1b. RESTRICTIVE MARKINGS		
2a. SECURITY CLASSIFICATION AUTHORITY			3. DISTRIBUTION/AVAILABILITY OF REPORT STATEMENT "A" Approved for public release; Distribution is unlimited.		
2b. DECLASSIFICATION/DOWNGRADING SCHEDULE					
4. PERFORMING ORGANIZATION REPORT NUMBER(S) 88-1825			5. MONITORING ORGANIZATION REPORT NUMBER(S)		
6a. NAME OF PERFORMING ORGANIZATION ACSC/EDC		6b. OFFICE SYMBOL (If applicable)		7a. NAME OF MONITORING ORGANIZATION	
6c. ADDRESS (City, State, and ZIP Code) Maxwell AFB AL 36112-5542			7b. ADDRESS (City, State, and ZIP Code)		
8a. NAME OF FUNDING/SPONSORING ORGANIZATION		8b. OFFICE SYMBOL (If applicable)		9. PROCUREMENT INSTRUMENT IDENTIFICATION NUMBER	
8c. ADDRESS (City, State, and ZIP Code)			10. SOURCE OF FUNDING NUMBERS		
			PROGRAM ELEMENT NO.	PROJECT NO.	TASK NO.
11. TITLE (Include Security Classification) BOOK ANALYSIS OF <u>EISENHOWER AND BERLIN, 1945 THE DECISION TO HALT AT THE ELBE</u>					
12. PERSONAL AUTHOR(S) Merkins, Jeffery R., Major, USAF					
13a. TYPE OF REPORT		13b. TIME COVERED FROM _____ TO _____		14. DATE OF REPORT (Year, Month, Day) 1988 April	
15. PAGE COUNT 34					
16. SUPPLEMENTARY NOTATION					
17. COSATI CODES			18. SUBJECT TERMS (Continue on reverse if necessary and identify by block number)		
FIELD	GROUP	SUB-GROUP			
19. ABSTRACT (Continue on reverse if necessary and identify by block number)  This project looks at General Eisenhower's decision in 1945 to halt the Allies at the Elbe River. The analysis describes and analyzes this historical decision to determine if General Eisenhower's approach in making this decision is a good example for today's military leaders. The analysis conclusion is General Eisenhower, utilizing his leadership traits of self-confidence, certainty of belief and emphasis on teamwork, made an excellent decision to halt at the Elbe River. The lesson to be learned from General Eisenhower's decision process is the importance of the teamwork concept to a leader in a Joint environment.					
20. DISTRIBUTION/AVAILABILITY OF ABSTRACT <input type="checkbox"/> UNCLASSIFIED/UNLIMITED <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> SAME AS RPT <input type="checkbox"/> DTIC USERS			21. ABSTRACT SECURITY CLASSIFICATION UNCLASSIFIED		
22a. NAME OF RESPONSIBLE INDIVIDUAL ACSC/EDC Maxwell AFB AL 366112-5542			22b. TELEPHONE (Include Area Code) (205) 293-2867		22c. OFFICE SYMBOL

## PREFACE

At the end of World War II and still today, many people believe the Allies could have captured Berlin before the Russians. These people believe if the Allies had taken Berlin before the Russians, today's troubles between the East and West in Berlin would not exist. The person blamed for causing this situation is General Eisenhower. His decision in 1945 to halt the Allies at the Elbe River allowed the Russians to capture Berlin.

This project looks at General Eisenhower's decision through a book analysis of Stephen E. Ambrose's book, Eisenhower and Berlin, 1945 The Decision to Halt at the Elbe. The analysis describes and analyzes this historical decision to determine if General Eisenhower's approach in making this decision is a good example for today's military leaders.

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## TABLE OF CONTENTS

Preface.....	iii
About the Author.....	iv
Executive Summary.....	vi
INTRODUCTION.....	1
CHAPTER ONE-- <u>EISENHOWER AND BERLIN, 1945 THE</u> <u>DECISION TO HALT AT THE ELBE</u>	
Sequence of Events.....	3
CHAPTER TWO--FACTORS INFLUENCING GENERAL EISENHOWER'S DECISION	
The Factors.....	7
General Eisenhower's Leadership Traits.....	7
Relationship with His Superiors.....	9
Allied Expeditionary Force Objectives.....	11
Allied Military Situation.....	12
British Political Priorities.....	13
American Political Priorities.....	14
CHAPTER THREE--ANALYSIS OF GENERAL EISENHOWER'S DECISION.....	16
CONCLUSION.....	20
ABOUT THE AUTHORS OF THE SOURCE MATERIAL.....	22
BIBLIOGRAPHY.....	25

## EXECUTIVE SUMMARY



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"insights into tomorrow"

**REPORT NUMBER** 88-1825

**AUTHOR(S)** MAJOR JEFFERY R. MERKINS, USAF

**TITLE** BOOK ANALYSIS OF EISENHOWER AND BERLIN, 1945 THE DECISION TO HALT AT THE ELBE

I. Purpose: This project looks at General Eisenhower's decision to halt the Allied troops at the Elbe through a book analysis of Eisenhower and Berlin, 1945 The Decision to Halt at the Elbe.

II. Problem Statement: Is General Eisenhower's approach in making his decision to halt the Allied troops at the Elbe a good example for today's military leaders?

III. Objectives: General Eisenhower's approach in making his decision to halt at the Elbe is analyzed by looking at the following:

- a. Synopsis of the book to establish sequence of events.
- b. General Eisenhower's leadership traits.
- c. His relationship with his superiors.
- d. Allied Expeditionary Force objectives.
- e. Military situation.
- f. British political priorities.
- g. American political priorities.
- h. General Eisenhower's decision process.



## CONTINUED

IV. Discussion of Analysis: General Eisenhower, utilizing his leadership traits of self-confidence, certainty of belief and emphasis on teamwork, was able to deal with the factors influencing his decision. These factors were the relationship with his superiors, British political priorities, and American political priorities. In each case, he was able to deal with these influences and minimize their impact on his decision. He did this by staying, as much as possible, away from using a U. S. nationalistic perspective in dealing with these factors. Instead, he took actions that supported teamwork among the Allies. Therefore, he was able to keep himself as Supreme Commander in a relatively independent decision-making position. In this position, he could concentrate on the military situation and how he was going to accomplish the Allied Expeditionary Force objective of destroying the German army. Looking at the military situation, he saw three remaining areas where the Germans had or planned to have major military strength. Again, being influenced by his leadership trait of emphasizing teamwork, his idea was to overrun all of Germany using all available Alliance troops, including the Russians. Therefore, based on this idea, he thought it made sense to divide the three major German troop areas up among the Alliance. By each nation taking an area they could, as a team, more quickly defeat the Germans. Further, by stopping his troops at the Elbe, there would be no chance of American or British troops running into Russian troops. The American troops would head south, the Russian troops would be in the center, and the British would head north.

V. Conclusion: General Eisenhower, utilizing his leadership traits of self-confidence, certainty of belief, and emphasis on teamwork, made an excellent decision to halt at the Elbe River. He made the decision he thought was best for the Alliance and accomplished the mission in the quickest possible way. The lesson to be learned from General Eisenhower's decision process is the importance of the teamwork concept to a leader in a Joint environment.

## INTRODUCTION

Stephen E. Ambrose, in his book Eisenhower and Berlin, 1945 The Decision to Halt at the Elbe, looks at General Eisenhower's decision to stop the Allied forces at the Elbe River, thereby allowing the Russians to capture Berlin. This decision has been critically questioned since the day it was made. Some people believe General Eisenhower made the wrong decision and that the military and political implications of his decision still impact East-West relations today.

Mr. Ambrose argues "that Ike was smart rather than dumb, that the questions [of the critics] reveal an ignorance of the military situation in March-April 1945 than a shrewdness about postwar politics" (2:xvi). He believes "In short, Eisenhower's insistence on speed in getting south [in Germany] saved many lives and shortened the war. Far from being Eisenhower's worst decision, as so many still believe, it was one of his best" (2:xvi). Although the author believes it wasn't just a military decision, he believes General Eisenhower made the decision to stop at the Elbe River also because "his hope was that avoiding a clash with the Russians in the last days of the war over the prestige question of who won the honor of taking Berlin would lead to a period of postwar cooperation between the victorious powers" (2:xvi-xvii). Therefore, General Eisenhower

believed that the key would be simple goodwill on both sides. For his part, Eisenhower was eager to show the Russians such goodwill. This was the reason above all others that Eisenhower left Berlin and Prague to the Russians. For all his constant insistence on "military" rather than "political" factors, he avoided... [Berlin] for the most obvious of political reasons--to please the Russians. They wanted the honor of taking Berlin; they felt they deserved it. Eisenhower did not disagree. Nothing he felt, would have gotten American-Russian postwar relations off to a worse start than to engage in a race for Berlin. He wanted to work with the Russians, not compete with them (2:xvii).

If, indeed this was one of General Eisenhower's best decisions as the author states, it seems appropriate to ask the question: Is General Eisenhower's approach in making his decision to halt at the Elbe River a good example for today's military leaders? To answer this question, the analysis will begin by looking at the sequence of events leading up to and following General Eisenhower's decision. This will be

accomplished by reviewing Mr. Ambrose's book Eisenhower and Berlin, 1945 The Decision to Halt at the Elbe. Then the factors (i.e., leadership traits, relationship with his superiors, military objectives, military situation, British and American political priorities) influencing General Eisenhower's decision process will be analyzed. Next, an analysis of General Eisenhower's decision-making process will be made by summarizing the above factors into a proven conclusion about the problem statement. Finally, this analysis concludes with lessons learned that can be passed along for today's military leaders.

## Chapter One

### EISENHOWER AND BERLIN, 1945 THE DECISION TO HALT AT THE ELBE SEQUENCE OF EVENTS

General Eisenhower, as Supreme Commander of the Allied Expeditionary Force, commanded a force of eight armies. These armies were advancing across central Europe in three army groups as follows:

The 21st Army Group to the north included the Canadian First Army, the British Second, and the American Ninth. The 12th Army Group in the center contained the American First and Third Armies. To the south, the 6th Army Group included the American Seventh and the French First Army (2:17).

These forces at the beginning of March 1945 were advancing toward the Rhine River in Germany. General Eisenhower's plan was to "bring his forces up to the Rhine River, make at least two and possibly three crossings, encircle the Ruhr, and then spread through Germany" (2:23). The emphasis at this time was to make the main effort in the north with General Montgomery's 21st Army Group. But on March 7, General Hodges' American First Army captured a bridge at Remagen and was able to set forces across the Rhine River. Once General Eisenhower heard of the crossing he told General Bradley, the 12th Army Group Commander, to get as many troops across the Rhine as possible. This was a critical decision because up to this time "Montgomery was to get the bulk of the available supplies and equipment;...[now,] Bradley would be in a position to make priority claims on supplies" (2:19).

While the American First Army established a beachhead at Remagen, the other Eisenhower forces moved quickly ahead. By the end of March, the 21st Army Group and the 6th Army Group had also crossed the Rhine in the north and south respectively. And as the plan called for, the 12th Army Group had started its push northeast as the 21st Army Group began pushing southeast in an attempt to isolate the Germans in the Ruhr. "Once the

junction [to the east of the Ruhr] was effected, they would turn eastward and overrun Germany" (2:47). But General Eisenhower hadn't yet decided what force would be used and in what actual direction they would proceed.

Then on March 27, General Eisenhower received a message from General Marshall suggesting "with the imminent breakup of German defenses the Supreme Commander might want to push heavy columns eastward on a broad front, . . . , in order to prevent the Germans from organizing in the south. He also raised the question of running into the Red Army" (2:47-48). Montgomery, on the same day, let Eisenhower know of his plans to drive to the Elbe River.

The following day, General Eisenhower made his decision.

He wired Montgomery, telling him once the junction at Kassel-Paderborn had been made, U. S. Ninth Army would revert to Bradley. 12th Army Group would then be responsible for mopping up the Ruhr and for delivering the main offensive on the Erfurt-Leipzig-Dresden Axis. Montgomery's mission would be to protect Bradley's northern flank (2:48).

This decision didn't make the British too happy. "They continued to assume that the main Allied drive would be in the north, under Montgomery's direction and headed for Berlin" (2:54). The big problem as the British saw it was the direction of advance. They "thought Eisenhower was making a grave mistake in advancing along the central rather than the northern route" (2:56). Prime Minister Churchill argued that the British were being excluded from the last campaign and not enough attention was being paid to the north. He stated "that Berlin remains a high strategic importance. Nothing will exert a psychological effect of despair upon all German forces of resistance equal to that of the fall of Berlin" (2:57). A debate took place among the Combined Chiefs of Staff over these issues. "The Joint Chiefs of Staff felt Eisenhower had conducted the campaign up to and across the Rhine in masterful fashion, and they were not willing to interfere with him" (2:64). But so strongly did Churchill feel about these issues that he took his appeal directly to the President. "The President who had on a few previous occasions gone along with Churchill and in the process overruled the Joint Chiefs, refused to do so this time" (2:64). Therefore, the debate ended after several days when "the British agreed in short, that they would no longer dispute 21st Army Group's role in the final campaign. [But] the question of Berlin remained open" (2:63).

The last part of March saw encirclement of the Ruhr area progress smoothly according to the plan. During this time, General Eisenhower was evaluating alternative approaches to use after the forces joined up east of the Ruhr. At that time, General Eisenhower discussed with General Bradley the possibilities of the 21st Army Group crossing the Elbe toward Berlin. Bradley's opinion was that it was not a good idea because of "fifty miles of lowlands separating the Elbe from Berlin. Montgomery would have to advance through an area studded with lakes, criss-crossed with streams, and interlaced with occasional canals" (2:89). Bradley added the prediction of "about 100,000 casualties" to capture Berlin, which he believed was a "pretty stiff price to pay for a prestige objective, especially when we've got to fall back and let the other fellow take over" (2:89). So Eisenhower decided, at least for this time, not to attempt to go to Berlin.

On April 1, General Eisenhower's forces advancing in the north and south around Ruhr had linked up east of the Ruhr area. From April 4-11, the forces rushed east without much resistance, with General Simpson's Ninth Army reaching the Elbe River on April 11. General Simpson felt he could proceed on to Berlin and beat the Russians, but before he moved forward, he asked General Eisenhower's approval. While waiting for a response, he established a bridgehead across the Elbe. General Eisenhower made his decision to stop at the Elbe on April 14. He decided that it was more important at this time to clean up the flanks to the north and south. If after these were completed and the opportunity to go to Berlin was still there, then he would try for Berlin.

On the same day General Eisenhower cabled General Marshall, the U. S. Chief of Staff, of his decision.

He said that not only were the Baltic and Bavarian objectives more important than the capital but that to plan for an immediate effort against Berlin "would be foolish in view of the relative situation of the Russians and ourselves...while it is true we have seized a small bridgehead over the Elbe, it must be remembered that only our spearheads are up to that river; our center of gravity is well back of there" (2:92-93).

General Eisenhower's troops would not have another chance to capture Berlin. The "Russians started their offensive for Berlin on April 16...and completed its capture on May 2" (2:94). In capturing Berlin, "the Russians suffered heavy

casualties (the exact number is in dispute: It was probably in excess of the 100,000 Bradley feared). Two months later, they gave up to the West over half of the city they had captured at such an enormous price" (2:98).

## Chapter Two

### FACTORS INFLUENCING GENERAL EISENHOWER'S DECISION

#### THE FACTORS

In analyzing General Eisenhower's decision not to race the Russians to Berlin, it is important to look at the factors influencing his decision. The first place to start is with the decision maker. It is important to know his leadership traits so it can be determined if these biases may have affected his decision. Then, General Eisenhower's relationship with his superiors will be analyzed to determine if they had any influence on his decision. Next, the Allied Expeditionary Force objectives need to be determined to establish their intent. Also, the military situation needs to be described in detail to establish a clear picture of the military factors General Eisenhower evaluated in making his decision. Finally, the British and American political priorities will be described to determine if they had any impact on General Eisenhower's decision.

#### GENERAL EISENHOWER'S LEADERSHIP TRAITS

General Eisenhower, prior to coming to Europe, had many assorted staff assignments but no command experience. This all changed when he came to Europe in June 1942, for over the next three years he was to hold several different command positions. First, he was assigned Commander of the European Theater of Operations (ETO). Then he commanded the Allied Operations in North Africa, Tunisia, Sicily and Italy. These assignments were followed by the appointment to the most important command position in military history, the Supreme Commander of the Allied Expeditionary Force. It was during these assignments that General Eisenhower determined the importance of emphasizing teamwork among the Allies and the importance of self-confidence and certainty of belief when commanding.

General Eisenhower was named commanding general of the ETO on 25 June 1942. The ETO was to prepare "a 'suicide' operation for the fall of 1942. Code-named SLEDGEHAMMER,



this was designed to force an early allied landing on the French coast. SLEDGEHAMMER was an emergency operation without hope of real success; it would go ahead only if the Red Army appeared to be on the verge of surrender" (3:96). In setting up the operations, "his emphasis was on teamwork. Drawing on his coaching methods, he insisted that the staff provide coordinated effort rather than flashy individual performances" (3:98). His reason for believing this was "war has become so comprehensive and so complicated that teamwork seems to me to be the essence of all success" (3:99). Even as his ETO staff grew to over two thousand officers and enlisted men, he never forgot the goal of maintaining teamwork.

Following command of the ETO, he went to the Mediterranean until December 1943. General Eisenhower, during this time, commanded the Allied landing in North Africa, and later the operations in Tunisia, Sicily and Italy. During this time, he showed both strength and weakness. His greatest strength was "the ability to get people of different nationalities and viewpoints to work together. Making Allied understanding his keynote, he insisted continually that his staff officers lay aside their national differences in his command" (16:34). On the other hand, in directing the military operations "he had shown a lack of that ruthless, driving force that would lead him to take control of a tactical situation.... He had not forced himself or his subordinates to the supreme effort; there had been an element of drift in the operations he directed" (1:214-215). These first command experiences were a learning time and would greatly benefit him when he became the Supreme Commander.

General Eisenhower was named Supreme Commander, Allied Expeditionary Force (AEF) in December 1943. He got the command by default. "Roosevelt said that he just could not sleep at night with Marshall out of country" (1:271). Nevertheless, there were many good reasons to select General Eisenhower. First, General Eisenhower brought to this job "a reputation for dealing satisfactorily with the British, French, and U. S. Forces. He had established the basis for close co-operation with the heads of the Allied governments and the Combined Chiefs of Staff. After a year of working with Allied forces in the Mediterranean area, he had demonstrated his knack for making a coalition work" (16:35). Other factors were "his supreme self-confidence, [and] a certainty of belief in himself and his abilities.... [But,] Eisenhower's emphasis on teamwork, his neverflagging insistence on working together was the single most important reason for his selection" (1:271).

As evidenced, during his time as the Supreme Commander, he proved:

he was ideal as an Allied Commander because of his intense desire to have everybody get along with everybody else. He felt strongly about things and on occasion was forced to insist upon his solution... But when confronted with a problem, Eisenhower's instinctive reaction was to seek a solution that everyone could live with (2:22).

General Eisenhower clearly was successful as the Supreme Commander. This in large part was due to his self-confidence, certainty of belief, and his dedication to teamwork among the Allies. These principles surely would influence the way he would make his decision.

#### RELATIONSHIP WITH HIS SUPERIORS

General Eisenhower, as the Supreme Commander, had unity of command over the Allied forces. This meant he had two chains of command above him to answer to, the American and British command hierarchy. Under this system, the individual superior's influence on the Supreme Commander depended on interpersonal relationships, position power and the power of the superior's country within the alliance at the time.

General Eisenhower, as the Supreme Commander in Europe, took his orders and guidance from the Combined Chiefs of Staff. This staff consisted of the American Joint Chiefs of Staff and the British Chiefs of Staff. This Combined Chiefs of Staff system worked well during the war, but an evolution did take place during this time. The power structure shifted to the American side.

In 1942, when the British were making the largest contribution to the alliance and the Combined Chiefs of Staff reached a deadlock, the British were able to insist upon their view.... In late 1943, when the two nations were making a fairly equal contribution and the Combined Chiefs of Staff reached a deadlock, it took a third party... to break it.... In 1945, when the Americans were making the largest contribution and there was a deadlock, the Americans insisted upon their view and it was carried out (2:63).

This change, resulting in the Joint Chiefs of Staff taking control of the Combined Chiefs of Staff, meant the United States had replaced Great Britain as the dominant power of the western alliance. The Combined Chiefs of Staff were responsible for directing the military campaign in Europe. They took their orders from the two heads of government, President Roosevelt and Prime Minister Churchill.

Roosevelt's dealings with the Joint Chiefs of Staff were much different from Churchill's with the British Chiefs of Staff. In part, this was due to structural differences in the two systems. As Commander in Chief of all American armed forces, Roosevelt was in such an exalted position that he was nearly out of sight. He did not attend meetings of the Joint Chiefs of Staff...and hardly ever participated in any detailed discussions of operations (2:51-52).

But this didn't mean President Roosevelt wasn't in command of the situation. President Roosevelt, quite the opposite, knew just what he was doing.

Roosevelt's awareness of the broad scope of his powers--while involving a willingness to intervene at any level,...also encompassed a perception of what it was not necessary for him to do. Where he refrained from intervening, he did so in some knowledge of what those initiatives were that he was allowing to pursue their wayward course. No one understood better than he the inner dynamics of American strength: how to mobilize it, how to draw on it, how to gauge its limits. Once mobilized, it did not need to be driven, it needed only to be steered (10:11).

This relationship further evolved "as the war progressed, the Joint Chiefs became more and more political-minded because of their personal relationships with Roosevelt" (13:316). And "the Joint Chiefs influence in general and Marshall's in particular, had grown; Roosevelt was increasingly inclined to accept his adviser's views" (2:64).

Prime Minister Churchill's approach in dealing with the British Chiefs of Staff was quite different.

Churchill's constitutional responsibilities required him to play a more active role in his relationship with the British Chiefs of Staff. As Minister of Defense, he regularly attended meetings of the British Chiefs of Staff: as an interested and often meddlesome observer, he kept in close contact with field commanders (2:52).

Next, after the President and the Prime Minister, General Eisenhower saw General Marshall and General Brooke as the two most important members of the Combined Chiefs of Staff. As heads of the American and British Armies respectively, they

were the ones most directly concerned with the war in Europe. General Eisenhower "respected Brooke but was always coldly formal" (2:52). General Brooke saw General Eisenhower as "past-master in handling of allies, entirely impartial and consequently trusted by all. A charming personality and good co-ordinator. But no real commander" (2:21).

It was quite the opposite relationship with General Marshall.

General Eisenhower maintained a close relationship with General Marshall. In frequent personal letters, Eisenhower outlined his views on coming campaigns or discussed frankly his successes and failures. General Marshall replied with letters of encouragement and sought new ways by which he could give additional aid to his subordinate (16:35).

General Eisenhower, as the Supreme Commander, answered to the Combined Chiefs of Staff. The important influencing factor here was that the decision-making power in the Combined Chiefs of Staff had shifted from the British to the Americans by the time he was making his decision on Berlin. Added to this was the power multiplier of a command chain that became progressively more interlinked as it continued.

There was the relationship between Eisenhower and Marshall with a father-son quality, plus the growing interrelations between Marshall and Roosevelt. Marshall "had gained Roosevelt's confidence and needed no intermediary" and as the war progressed, he "generally accepted Roosevelt's concept of the conduct of war" (13:317). Therefore, the approval of military recommendations going up the chain generally went smoothly and the political guidance downward was generally accepted. The American chain of command influencing General Eisenhower had become a strictly American operation. The British ability to influence General Eisenhower's decisions was by this time severely limited. The British lack of power within the Alliance could only now depend on Churchill's personal appeals.

#### ALLIED EXPEDITIONARY FORCE OBJECTIVES

General Eisenhower received his orders from the Combined Chiefs of Staff. Their directive for the European campaign against Germany was straightforward and clear. "You will enter the continent of Europe, and, in conjunction with the other United Nations, undertake operations aimed at the heart of Germany and the destruction of her armed force" (16:53).

## ALLIED MILITARY SITUATION

General Eisenhower had many military factors to consider when making his decision as to what action his troops should take from the Elbe River. The first factor influencing his decision was the German military situation in the north of Germany and Europe. In the north, the Germans still occupied the German ports of Bremen and Hamburg. Capturing these ports, the Allies could "seize and inspect ships and material and prevent the renewal of the U-boat attacks" (8:134). Further to the north, the Germans still had troops in Holland, Denmark, and Norway. These troops were Germany's last source of reserves. General Eisenhower was also concerned about the possibility of the Russians advancing into Denmark.

In central Germany, there was Berlin and the majority of the Russians. The situation was as follows:

The Americans reached the Elbe on April 11. They had one small bridgehead, were faced by one weak German army, and had a number of water barriers between them and Berlin. American strength in the area was not much more than 50,000 men, with little artillery.... The Russians, fifteen miles closer to Berlin, had two solid bridgeheads, 1,250,000 men, and 22,000 pieces of artillery. They were faced by two weak German armies and had flat, dry land between them and Berlin (2:93-94).

But "Eisenhower knew almost nothing of the Red Army's intentions. There was no day-to-day military coordination between Anglo-American and Soviet commanders in the field" (11:208). Not knowing his Russian ally's plan for Berlin made General Eisenhower's decision very difficult. "He was reluctant to enter into a contest with the Russians for Berlin. That might prove not only embarrassing for the loser but--in the event of an unexpected meeting between the onrushing armies--catastrophic for both forces" (11:209).

General Eisenhower was concerned because "when they reached the Elbe, the Americans were well inside what was to be the Soviet zone of occupation but there was still no political or military agreement to restrain them from advancing farther. No 'stopline' had yet been discussed with the Russians" (14:694). He didn't want the two advancing armies to mistakenly get into a battle.

In southern Germany, General Eisenhower was concerned about a possible National Redoubt. He had been receiving intelligence reports indicating

the Nazi, with Hitler at their head, intended to make a last ditch, Wagnerian stand. The rugged stronghold

[area around Berchtesgaden] was considered almost impregnable and its fanatical defenders might hold out for as long as two years. There was another, even more chilling aspect; specially trained commando-type forces--...called..."Werewolves"--were expected to sally out from the Alpine bastion and create havoc among the occupation armies (11:210).

These two possibilities were of major concern to General Eisenhower because he

was also concerned about the possible effects of prolonged German resistance on the grand alliance. ...a delay in the end of the war was dangerous because of the possibility of an East-West split, signs of which appeared in April over Poland and over the surrender of German forces in Italy. A costly siege of prepared defensive positions might involve Russia and the West in disagreements through which the Germans "might yet be able to secure terms more favorable than unconditional surrender" (2:71).

#### BRITISH POLITICAL PRIORITIES

The Allies were closing in on Berlin and it was just a matter of time before the fate of Germany was sealed. But there was to be one last big controversy of the war, the question of whether to race the Russians to Berlin. The main cause of the political controversy over the Berlin decision was the growing distrust of the Russians felt by Prime Minister Churchill and President Roosevelt. The distrust of the Russians started shortly after the Yalta Agreement.

Within three weeks of the conference, Russia had ousted the government of Soviet-occupied Rumania... Poland was lost, too: the promised free elections had not taken place. Contemptuously, Stalin seemed to have turned his back on the very heart of the Yalta Pact, which stated that the Allied powers would assist "peoples liberated from the dominion of Nazi Germany and...former Axis satellite states...to create democratic institutions of their own choice" (11:162-163).

Churchill and Roosevelt differed in their approach on how to handle this situation.

Prime Minister Churchill began to see events of early 1945 as "not merely the final stages of one great struggle but the beginning of another" (12:109). In this light, Churchill thought it very important for the Western Allies to end the

war in a position of strength.

The strategy they [British] wished to adopt in Germany was designed, not for reasons of defense or attack against Russia...but the object, which they recognized must remain subsidiary to the immediate military task, of negotiating from strength. In the atmosphere of the time, this seemed to them useful--possibly an essential--contribution to the tripartite alliance, guarding it from that threat of excess Soviet ambition which Soviet conquests appeared to foster. The British in fact had not abandoned the objects, or even entirely the hopes, of the Yalta Conference.... They did not despair of a solution with the Russians: indeed they expected it. But they expected it as a result of firm and timely measures which would remind their ally of his obligations, and whose inception depended on the movements of the Western Armies in the few weeks that remained (4:645).

Believing this, Churchill saw Berlin as a political objective of number one importance.

Moreover, he foresaw that an end to German military power would completely transform the wartime light in which the Soviet Union had looked upon her allies. Only a common enemy could unite two such irreconcilable systems. Remove that enemy and they would once more look upon each other as enemies. Therefore, argued Churchill...since there was to be a new confrontation between two new rivals, this confrontation should start as far east in Europe as possible. For this reason, if for no other, Berlin was a "prime and true objective of the Anglo-American armies" (12:14-15).

Churchill believed "the war was won; it was the post-war balance of power that mattered now" (14:692). "For almost three and one-half years, the Wehrmacht [German Army] had been at the center of Eisenhower's thoughts; now Churchill wanted him to think rather less about the Germans, more about the Russians" (1:391). Fighting for his position, Churchill applied heavy pressure on Eisenhower throughout the early months of 1945. This pressure included many personal visits and messages from Churchill.

#### AMERICAN POLITICAL PRIORITIES

While Churchill was looking to deal with the Russians from a position of strength after the war, "Roosevelt believed that the problem could be solved by an extension of the 'Good Neighbor' policy which he had applied with such success in the Western Hemisphere" (14:447). His view was "since Russia is the decisive

factor in the war, she must be given every assistance and every effort must be made to obtain her friendship. Since without question she will dominate Europe on the defeat of the Axis, it is even more essential to develop and maintain the most friendly relations with Russia" (14:447). President Roosevelt believed he could "hold the Grand Alliance together, primarily through the device of the United Nations, which was just formed. He thought it important for America to make every effort to get along with the Russians, for in his view, postwar cooperation between the United States and Russia was essential to world peace" (9:186).

Although President Roosevelt was more reluctant to try to influence General Eisenhower's decision, the American Commander in Chief's policy was known to General Eisenhower. Roosevelt repeatedly made his position clear. He "wanted to defeat Germany and eliminate the Nazi threat to world civilization, and he wanted to continue the working partnership with the Russians after the war" (2:29).

Additionally, the American people were by now becoming more concerned about the war in the Pacific. The growing American desire was to get the war over in Europe as soon as possible so the American troops could be redeployed in the Pacific. Therefore, "Eisenhower was under constant and great pressure to accomplish this goal, and his staff was working on redeployment plans long before the war ended" (2:70).

Finally, there was pressure on General Eisenhower not only to end the war in Europe to get the American troops to the Pacific, but also to get Russia's troops to the Pacific. "The Russians promised to declare war on Japan three months after the defeat of Germany" (2:70).



## Chapter Three

### ANALYSIS OF GENERAL EISENHOWER'S DECISION

In making his decision to halt at the Elbe River, General Eisenhower was determined to make every effort to carry out his responsibilities in accordance with military requirements and not political concerns. This is only natural for an American military officer; however, there was a deeper reason for the way General Eisenhower made his decision. It was his determination and never-flagging insistence on having the Allies work together. This emphasis on teamwork explains General Eisenhower's process in making his final decision.

General Eisenhower, relying on his leadership trait of emphasizing teamwork, used this trait to handle the influencing factors of American political priorities, British political priorities, and relationship with superiors. His purpose was to keep the Allies (American and British team) and the Alliance (American, British, and Russian team) together to assure the German army was defeated and have unconditional surrender declared by Germany as soon as possible. Also, by ending the war as soon as possible, further teamwork would be promoted. Limiting further differences between the Alliance would help the Russians get to the Pacific to team up against Japan.

General Eisenhower, in his decision process, used his concept of teamwork in dealing with American political priorities. In keeping with the team concept, he couldn't visibly take sides with either the Americans or British in regard to his decision. He had to make his decision based on what was good for the Allies so they could accomplish their goal of the destruction of the German army. But being an American officer, he did have a responsibility to the American Commander in Chief. General Eisenhower was able to deal with this situation by making it clear to the Combined Chiefs of Staff that he was going to base his decision on military requirements and not political concerns. Upon this basis, he deemphasized the military importance of Berlin and reemphasized the importance of the Allied Expeditionary Force

objective. This allowed him to follow President Roosevelt's political guidance by keeping the priority on destroying the German army. At the same time, he wasn't outwardly basing his decision on American political policy. Clearly, he was showing concern for making the decision based on the agreed to Allied military objective. In this way, General Eisenhower remained committed to his American Commander in Chief and the Allies by trying to accomplish their goals. His actions were attempting to hold the team together.

In addressing Prime Minister Churchill's desire for General Eisenhower to make his decision based on political consideration, he was correct in resisting this influence. He resisted Churchill's influence by emphasizing the military objectives he was tasked to accomplish. This was the correct approach because it kept him from making a political decision on nationalistic grounds. Furthermore, it caused him to base his decision on what was good for the Allies. Additionally, the political decision Churchill was pushing for was counter to the President's political policy, and for General Eisenhower to make such a decision would have been inappropriate. The President is the one who makes national policy, not the soldier in the field. So General Eisenhower's approach in handling Churchill was correct. If Churchill wanted Berlin for political reasons, he would have to see the President and agree with him on changing the Allies' military objectives. If a member of the Allies wanted to change the direction in which the team was going, he had to get the other team members to agree to the new objectives before Eisenhower would base his decision on them.

In dealing with the Combined Chiefs of Staff, General Eisenhower had the problem of British discontent with the direction of the final Allied campaign. The British believed the main Allied thrust across Germany should be in the north toward Berlin instead of across central Germany. They saw Berlin as very important politically. The capture of Berlin would put the Allies in a position of strength in dealing with the Russians after the war. General Eisenhower was still trying to keep the Allies focused on winning the war. In this attempt, he made an excellent move by evaluating the political decision up the chain of command. He made it clear to the Combined Chiefs of Staff that he was going to follow their existing objectives until they were changed. He sent a message to them asking "if the Combined Chiefs of Staff should decide that the Allied effort to take Berlin outweighs purely military consideration in this theater, I would cheerfully re-adjust my plans and thinking so as to carry out such an operation" (11:279). The Supreme Commander received no new policy directives from his superiors. Therefore the Allies were back together as a team; maybe not really happy, but they were working together again

under the existing directives. So General Eisenhower clearly worked hard to keep the Allies working together to accomplish their objectives. He had gotten the objectives reverified and had not been given any political directives from his superiors for postwar Germany. His job remained to make a decision on how to destroy the German army as fast as possible.

In evaluating the military situation, he saw there were still three major areas where the destruction of German armed forces hadn't taken place. In the north, the German troops still held several German ports: Holland, Denmark, and Norway. In central Germany was Berlin, and in the south there was the possible National Redoubt. General Eisenhower concluded that the National Redoubt was the most important area because "there was evidence to support the view that Hitler and the leading Nazis were planning to withdraw to a mountain stronghold around Berchtesgaden for a last Wagnerian stand" (14:690). He had several other military inputs to consider in his decision. First, the Russians, who were still part of the Alliance, had a large force very close to Berlin. Second, there was Bradley's discussion with Eisenhower on the possibilities of advancing to Berlin. Third, Marshall's message of concern about the Germans organizing in the south and the question about running into the Red Army was voiced. Last, there was still no agreement with the Russians on a meeting place between the two forces.

Based on the military situation and inputs, General Eisenhower, influenced by his personal leadership trait and his professional military training, made a decision that reflected teamwork and military requirements. This time, however, the team was not just limited to the Western Allies, but also included the Russians. He felt the best way for the Alliance to destroy the remaining German army was to overpower the whole of Germany as fast as possible. He therefore took the team approach to his decision. First, to make sure none of the Alliance members ran into each other, he made the Elbe River the meeting line with the Russians. The Elbe was a well-defined line to minimize the possibility of mistaken conflict with the Russians. Such a conflict would tarnish the Alliance's victory by causing possible bad feelings between the Alliance members after the war. Then, following his idea of overrunning Germany, he decided to have the American, British, and Russian troops each take a remaining major military area based on their Alliance contributions during the war. He would allow the Russians to take Berlin because they were already so close, and had been fighting the major front of the war. He gave the Americans the National Redoubt, an area thought high in priority because of the possibility Hitler might leave Berlin to make his last stand there. The Americans got this area because of their major efforts to supply the Alliance, and they were now supplying more troops to the western front than the British. The British got the northern German port area to cut

the last remaining German reserve off from Hitler, thereby recognizing the British contribution to the war effort.

General Eisenhower, utilizing his leadership traits of self-confidence, certainty of belief and emphasis on teamwork, made an excellent team decision to halt at the Elbe River. He made sure he took "everything into account, gather[ed] relevant information, and consider[ed] all possible consequences. Then he acted" (1:271). He made the decision he thought best for the Alliance and accomplished the mission in the quickest possible way. General Eisenhower was committed to the end, as Supreme Commander, to his belief in teamwork. No one ally was to win the war singlehandedly. They were to win the war together. "There was going to be no mean-spirited haggling over honor or glory; victory was going to be shared" (10:507).

## CONCLUSION

Mr. Ambrose concludes that General Eisenhower made a good decision not to race the Russians to Berlin. He believes "Eisenhower's insistence on speed in getting south [in Germany] saved many lives and shortened the war" (2:xvi). He states it wasn't just a military decision, but was also political. He feels General Eisenhower stopped at the Elbe River also in the "hope to avoid a clash over prestige" (2:xvi), to "show the Russians...goodwill" (2:xvii) and last but not least, "to please the Russians" (2:xvii).

From the analysis of General Eisenhower's decision, it is clear the influence General Eisenhower's own leadership traits had on his decision. His self-confidence, certainty of belief, and most importantly his dedication to teamwork, set the tone for how he approached his decision to stop at the Elbe River. He handled the factors (relationship with superiors, military objectives, military situation, British and American political priorities) influencing his decision not with political consideration, as Mr. Ambrose claims, but by sticking to his belief in teamwork. This belief in teamwork kept the Supreme Commander in a position to be successful. He stayed away from a political decision while keeping in a position of making a decision based on the military situation, Allied objectives, and what was good for the Alliance. This emphasis on teamwork (shared goals, accomplishments, and victory) is why General Eisenhower's approach in making the decision to stop at the Elbe River is a good example for today's military leaders.

The lesson to be learned from this situation is the importance of the teamwork concept to a leader in a joint environment. It is through teamwork the goals of the organization will be accomplished. But in a joint environment, there are many influences that may divert the organization from the straight line course to accomplishing its goals. There are nationalistic concerns, political priorities, service parochialism, and individual perceptions that can cause a joint organization to stray from its assigned goals and objectives. Therefore it is important for the leader to keep the organization on course towards its objectives. To do this, a leader must use the concept of teamwork as a major criterion in all his or her actions and decisions. The leader must keep in a position of the impartial military decision maker, who accomplishes the job in accordance with the military objective. The accomplishing of this objective must be through teamwork, meaning some compromise will have to be made and the probability of flashy performances limited. But the organization's members will be treated fairly and their chances of failing will be minimized, therefore assuring in the end the organization

will accomplish the objectives and equally share the victory. This is no easy task, as

Admiral Cunningham,...a member of the CCS [Combined Chiefs of Staff]...told Eisenhower it had been a great experience for him to see the forces of two nations, made up of men with different upbringings, conflicting ideas on staff work, and basic "apparently irreconcilable ideas," brought together and knitted into a team. "I do not believe," Cunningham said "that any other man than yourself could have done it" (1:271).

But today with the increased emphasis on joint operations, it will take more than one person. Today's leader will have to be committed to teamwork if the joint operation is to be successful.

General Eisenhower, knowing the importance of teamwork, made the correct decision to halt at the Elbe. He "realized what no one else seemed to namely, that by concentrating on destroying the Wehrmacht [German army] rather than getting to Berlin first...he could hold the Alliance together, at least until Hitler's defeat was complete" (3:194).

## ABOUT THE AUTHORS OF THE SOURCE MATERIAL

Stephen E. Ambrose, the author of Eisenhower: Eisenhower and Berlin, 1945 The Decision to Halt at the Elbe; and Ike Abilene to Berlin was born January 10, 1936, in Decatur, Illinois.

He was Associate Editor of Dwight D. Eisenhower's military papers (published as The War Years), he had personal contact with the President himself, as well as access to unpublished material on World War II. [He was also a] Professor at the Naval War College and Eisenhower's Professor of War and Peace at Kansas State University before becoming Professor of History at Louisiana State University in New Orleans (3:221).

Alan Chalfont, the author of Montgomery of Alamein:

was a Regular Army officer between 1939 and 1961, defense correspondent of the London Times 1961-64, and British Minister of State for Foreign Affairs between 1964 and 1970. He is a frequent contributor to the London Times and has contributed a series of major interviews to BBC television--"The Chalfont Profiles" (4:ABOUT THE AUTHOR).

John Ehrman, the author of Grand Strategy, was born in London, England in 1920. He received his M. A. from Trinity College, Cambridge, in 1945. He was a member of the historical section of the Cabinet Office in London from 1948-56. Then he was a Lee Knowles Lecturer at Cambridge University, Trinity College, from 1957-58 and is currently a full-time writer. His writings include Volume V: August 1943-September 1944, Volume VI: October 1944-August 1945, Cabinet Government and War, 1890-1940 (6:216).

Dwight D. Eisenhower, the author of Crusade in Europe, was born in Denison, Texas, in 1890. He graduated from United States Military Academy in 1915, the Command and General Staff College, Army War College and Army Industrial College. He was the Supreme Commander of the Allied Expeditionary Force from 1943-53, and later became President of the United States. (5:192-193)

Eric Larrabee, the author of Commander in Chief, was born in 1922 in Massachusetts.

He was associate editor of Harper's Magazine (1946-58), managing editor of American Heritage (1958-61), then editorial consultant to Doubleday & Company (1963-69). He has written and edited several books on art and American society as well as being a regular contributor of articles and reviews to national magazines. He was Provost of the Faculty of Arts and Letters at SUNY Buffalo, taught there and at Sarah Lawrence College and Columbia University, and is now Dean of Arts and Design at Pratt Institute (10:ABOUT THE AUTHOR).

Cornelius Ryan, the author of The Last Battle:

was born in Dublin, Ireland in 1920 and became an American citizen in 1951. He began his career as a war correspondent in 1943 and covered the entire European war up to the fall of Berlin; after the end of hostilities in Europe he covered the Pacific war. Mr. Ryan has written eight books and is world famous as the author of The Longest Day (11:ABOUT THE AUTHOR).

John Strawson, the author of The Battle for Berlin, was born in London, England, in 1921. Major General Strawson has been in the British Army since 1940. He had a varied career with assignments to such places as the British Staff College 1951-52; the War Office 1960-62; commanding the Queen's Royal Irish Hussars 1963-65; and at headquarters of United Kingdom Land Forces 1972-76 as Military Advisor. His other writings include The Battle for North Africa, Hitler's Battles for Europe and The Battle for the Ardennes. (7:466)

John Toland, the author of The Last 100 Days:

was born in La Crosse, Wisconsin, and worked his way through Phillips Exeter Academy and Williams College, where he graduated Phi Beta Kappa in 1936. During World War II he served in the Special Services Division of the United States Army. After the war he came to New York and began a successful career as a free-lance writer. Since then he has contributed to almost all national magazines and written four books: Ships in the Sky (1956), Battle: The Story of the Bulge (1959), But Not in Shame: The Six Months After Pearl Harbor (1961) and The Dillinger Days (13:ABOUT THE AUTHOR).

Chester Wilmot wrote The Struggle for Europe. No information could be found about this author.



Forest C. Pogue wrote The Decision to Halt at the Elbe and Supreme Command. He received a Ph. D. in history at Clark University. He served as a combat historian with the First U. S. Army in World War II. Currently, he is the Director of the George C. Marshall Research Center. (15:413)

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